before i begIN ALLOW ME TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO YOU FOR SUPPORTING AND ATTENDING THESE MEDWEEK SERVICES DURING THE LENTEN SEASON. MY EXPERIENCE WITH WED. EVENING SERVICES IN THE PAST HAS BEEN FAR FROM EXCITING AND AS YOU CAN IMAGINE I WAS QUITE DISCOURAGED WHEN FIVE MEMBERS SHOWED UP FOR OUR FIRST ATTEMPT. AFTER IT WAS PROPERLY PUBLICIZED, HOWEVER, I DISCOVERED THAT YOU ARE A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SERIOUS ABOUT MAKING SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR EASTER. YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE EVENTS OF CALVARY AND THE MEANING THEY HAVE FOR YOUR LIVES AND IT HAS BEEN GRATIFYING TO ME TO SHARE THIS EXPERIENCE WITH YOU.

DURING THE PAST FOUR WEEKS WE HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THE ACTORS IN CALVARY'S DRAMA. (THOSE WHO SPOKE TO THE CROSS.) AND IN EVERY INSTANCE IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE WORDS THAT FELL ON OUR LORD'S EARS COULD WELL HAVE BEEN SPOKEN BY US HAD WE BEEN THERE. BUT NOW WE HAVE COME TO THE END OF THE LINE, THE ONLY WORDS THAT REMAIN TO BE SPOKEN TO THE CROSS ARE OUR OWN. WITH GOOD FRIDAY JUST TWO DAYS IN THE FUTURE WE MUST BEGIN THINKING ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY TO A DYING LORD. WHAT WILL BE OUR WORDS TO THE CROSS. I THINK PERHAPS IF WE PONDER THE MEANING OF THE CRUCIFIXION, IF WE UNDERSTAND IT FULLY WE WILL FIND OURSELVES SPEECHLESS. WHAT POSSIBLY CAN WE SAY IN THE FACE OF DIVINE LOVE SUFFERING FOR OUR SAKES?

CHRISTIANITIES' CENTRAL SYMBOL IS AN EMPTY TOMB**BUT WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT THE EMPTY TOMB IS MEANINGLESS WITHOUT THE CROSS. A CHRIST WHO ROSE FROM THE DEAD IS OUR REDEEMER ONLY BECAUSE HE FIRST DIED WILLINGLY ON OUR BEHALF. AND SO AS WE PREPARE TO UTTER OUR WORDS TO THE CROSS WE MUST THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS, WHAT SIGNIFICANCE DOES IT HAVE FOR EACH ONE OF US PERSONALLY.

THERE ARE THREE DIFFERENT WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE, ALL THREE OF THESE PHILOSOPHIES HAVE BEEN EXPOUNDED BY MEN DOWN THROUGH HISTORY AND ARE STILL OPERATIONAL TODAY.

FIRSTLY THERE IS THE PHILOSOPHY THAT REGARDS THE WORLD AS BAD, LIFE IS UNCONDITIONALLY EVIL, GOOD IS SIMPLY NONEXISTANT. THIS VIEW IS STILL HELD BY MOST OF THE MYSTICAL EASTERN RELIGIONS, WHERE A MAN'S HIGHEST ACHIEVEMENT IS TO COMPLETELY ESCAPE FROM LIFE. THE HIGHEST GOOD IS AVAILABLE ONLY WHEN ONE HAS WHOLLY MASTERED HIMSELF. IS IMMUNE TO BOTH PAIN AND PLEASURE, WHEN HE IS COMPLETELY ISOLATED, LIVING AND YET NOT PARTICIPATING IN THIS EVIL WORLD. THIS IS THE OBJECT OF THE DEVOUT BUDDAHISTS WHO SIT DAY IN AND DAY OUT STARING AT THE SUN UNTIL THEY ARE BLIND: OR THE SAME TYPE OF MYSTIC WHO SPENDS ALL HIS TIME ON A BED OF NAILS TO PROVE THAT HE IS NO LONGER A PART OF OUR LIFE. ABSOLUTE ESCAPE FROM LIFE IS SALVATION FOR THESE PEOPLE, THE BUDDAHIST CALLS IT NIRVANA. THE ONE BIG FLAW IN THE REASON OF THIS PHILOSOPHY STICKS

OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB, IF LIFE IS ALL EVIL, IF SALVATION IS MAINTAINED ONLY BY SEPARATING ONESELF FROM LIFE AND THE WORLD, WHAT POSSIBLE REASON IS THERE FOR LIVING. ? IF THIS PHILOSOPHY WAS PUSHED TO ~~XXXXXXXX~~ TO ITS LOGICAL END THERE WOULD BE ONLY ONE ALTERNATIVE / TO TAKE ONE'S OWN LIFE. OBVIOUSLY THIS WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD CANNOT BE RECONCILED WITH CHRISTIANITY.

SECONDLY AND EXACTLY OPPOSITE FROM THIS VIEW IS THE PHILOSOPHY THAT BELIEVES LIFE TO BE UNCONDITIONALLY GOOD. EVIL AND BADNESS, AS SUCH, SIMPLY DO NOT EXIST, WHENEVER ONE OF THESE PERSONS CONFRONTS A SITUATION THAT WOULD ORDINARILY BE CALLED EVIL IT IS EXPLAINED MERELY AS THE ABSENCE OF GOOD, BUT NOT EVIL. THIS PHILOSOPHY IS CALLED IDEALISM AND ON MANY OCCASIONS HAS FOUND ITS WAY INTO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. IN EUPROPEAN LIBERALISM EXTENDING UP TO THE BEGINNING OF THIS CENTURY AND THE 1st WORLD WAR IDEALISM WAS THE ACCEPTED PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE. IT WAS A ROSY WORLD, WITHOUT STRIFE, WITH SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SEEMINGLY ON THE WAY TO BRINGING ABOUT UNIVERSAL COMFORT AND LUXURY. EACH PERSON BORN WAS THOUGHT TO BE ALL GOODNESS, EVIL DID NOT EXIST, NOT IN THE HUMAN SOUL, NOT IN LIFE ITSELF. THIS IS AN ATTRATIVE PHILOSOPHY, IT IS EASY TO ACCEPT AND EMBRACE, / HOWEVER / IT SIMPLY IS NOT VALID. WITH THE OUTBREAK OF WWI ITS CAUSE WAS DELIVERED A STAGGERING BLOW FOR IT IS DIFFICULT TO CALL WORLD WIDE WAR MERELY THE ABSENCE OF GOOD. TODAY LIBERAL IDEALISM IS NEARLY DEAD AND RIGHTLY SO.

THE THIRD WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD, OR PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND THE ONE THAT IS CHRISTIAN CAN BE CALLED DUALISM. LIFE IS NOT ALL GOOD OR ALL EVIL, IT CONTAINS ELEMENTS OF BOTH. THE POTENTIAL FOR BOTH GOOD AND EVIL ARE BORN IN A PERSON AND OF COURSE THEY MANIFEST THEMSELVES DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT PERSONS. GOOD AND EVIL BOTH EXIST IN THE WORLD AND ARE ENGAGED IN A CONSTANT STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY. (I FIND IT HARD TO UNDERSTAND HOW ANYONE WITH THEIR EYES OPEN COULD UNCONDITIONALLY DENY THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL.) IT IS PART OF THE LIFE WE LIVE AND WE MUST FIND MEANS OF COPING WITH AND SUBDUING. IT.

LIKEWISE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES THERE IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL AND BOTH SHOW THEIR FACES IN THE EXISTENCE OF EACH ONE OF US. WE ~~XXXX~~ BELIEVE THAT EVERY HUMAN THAT EVER LIVED HAS SINNED OR HAS SHOWN HIS POTENTIAL FOR EVIL, AND NEEDS FORGIVENSS. AND OF COURSE WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT THE POTENTIAL FOR GOOD IS REALIZED TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

THIS LEADS TO THE QUESTION OF WHICH IS THE SUPREME FORCE, GOOD OR EVIL: WHICH IS MORE POWERFUL IN THE WORLD, THE BADNESS OR THE GOODNESS? IT IS AT THIS POINT THAT THE IMAGE OF THE CROSS CASTS IT SHADOW INTO OUR THINKING AND INTO OUR LIVES.

JESUS CHRIST WAS THE EPITOME OF GOODNESS IN THE WORLD. BECAUSE HE WAS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, SIN WAS SOMETHING UNKNOWN IN HIS LIFE: THERE WAS NOTHING EVIL ABOUT HIM. THE POTENTIAL FOR EVIL THAT IS IN ALL OF US WAS SIMPLY NONEXISTANT IN HIS LIFE. HE WAS PERFECTION.

IN JESUS CHRIST PURE GOODNESS WALKED AMONG MEN AND WHAT HAPPENED? WAS HE ACCLAIMED BY ALL, HALLOWED AND REVERED AS THE EXAMPLE OF EARTHLY PERFECTION? DID THE WHOLE WORLD BOW AT HIS FEET AND PLEDGE TO IMITATE HIS GOODNESS? YOU KNOW THE ANSWER, THE WORLD CRUCIFIED HIM. EVIL WON THE DAY AS GOODNESS DIED ON THE CROSS. THIS FACT FOREVER PROVES THAT EVIL DOES EXIST AND SEEMS ALSO TO PROVE THAT EVIL REIGNS SUPREME IN THE WORLD. ON CALVARY GOOD AND EVIL MET HEAD ON IN BATTLE AND EVIL WON THE FIRST ROUND.

IF THE STORY STOPPED HERE THE SITUATION WOULD BE TRAGIC INDEED. WHAT WOULD BE THE USE OF LIVING? NOTHING GOOD COULD COME OF IT. WHY TRY TO BE GOOD? JESUS WAS GOOD AND WAS REWARDED BY DEATH. BUT THE STORY DOES NOT END HERE. GOODNESS DID NOT LOSE THE BATTLE BY ANY MEANS, JESUS DID NOT CEASE TO EXIST AFTER HIS DEATH. THREE DAYS AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION GOODNESS ROSE AGAIN, FOREVER DEFEATING EVIL, FOREVER PROVING THAT THE FORCES OF EVIL MUST BOW TO THE FORCE OF GOOD.

THIS IS THE NEWS THAT MAKES LIFE WORTH WHILE, AS I HAVE TRIED TO POINT OUT, WITHOUT THIS NEWS ALL IS FUTILE. IT DOES NOT DENY THAT EVIL EXISTS, ON THE OTHER HAND IT TESTIFIES TO ITS POWER. BUT MOST IMPORTANT, THE EMPTY CROSS AND THE EMPTY TOMB TELL EACH ONE OF US THAT GOOD CAN WIN, FOR IT HAS BEEN DONE.

AS I SAID SUNDAY IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW HOW ONE SHOULD FEEL ON GOOD FRIDAY, SHOULD WE BE SAD OR GLAD? AS A MATTER OF FACT WOULDN'T IT BE MORE APPROPRIATE TO CALL THE DAY BAD FRIDAY? THE GOOD IN GOOD FRIDAY IS JUST THIS. ON THAT DAY GOOD AND EVIL FACED ONE ANOTHER IN BATTLE, A TERRIBLE CONFLICT ENSUED AND AFTER THREE DAYS GOOD EMERGED THE VICTOR. CERTAINLY EVIL WON THE FIRST ROUND BUT ULTIMATELY IT LOST THE MATCH.

HOW DO WE FEEL ON THAT DAY? FIRSTLY SORRY FOR THE TIMES EVIL HAS RAISED ITS UGLY HEAD IN OUR OWN LIVES BECAUSE HEREIN WE SHARE THE GUILT FOR OUR LORD'S CRUCIFIXION. BUT SECONDLY AND MORE IMPORTANTLY WE ARE THANKFUL. IT WAS A DEAR PRICE JESUS PAID THAT DAY JUST TO PROVE A POINT. THE CLUE TO HOW WE SHOULD FEEL IS IN THE FACT THAT GOD LOVED US SO MUCH THAT HE WAS WILLING TO SACRIFICE THE CHRIST, TO BEAR TORTURE AND DEATH TO PROVE THAT ULTIMATELY GOOD IS THE VICTOR. THE DRAMA OF THE CRUCIFIXION IS NOT SO MUCH THE STORY OF WHAT MEN DID TO JESUS CHRIST, BUT THE STORY OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR MAN.

AT THIS POINT I MUST TELL A STORY THAT HAS MEANT MUCH TO ME ALTHOUGH OF LITTLE INTEREST TO YOU: IT IS A STORY THAT DEALS PRECISELY WITH THIS POINT AND IS SOMEWHAT RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS SERMON.

DURING MY FIRST YEAR AT SEMINARY MY WIFE AND I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF LIVING IN THE SAME APARTMENT BUILDING WITH A YOUNG AUSTRALIAN MINISTER AND HIS WIFE WHO WERE IN THIS COUNTRY TO STUDY AT THE U. OF C. FOR A YEAR. WE BECAME FRIENDS IMMEDIATELY AND

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR ENJOYED A WARM AND MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP. THROUGHOUT COLLEGE AND GRADUATE SCHOOL AND WORKING IN CHURCHES ONE MEETS MANY MEN DESERVIJG OF RESPECT BUT I CAN TRULY SAY I HAVE NEVER ENCOUNTERED A PERSON I RESPECTED AS HIGHLY AS THIS YOUNG MINISTER. WHEN HE GREETED YOU SINCER ITY POURED FROM HIM, HE HAD THE ABILITY TO MAKE GRACE BEFORE A MEAL MAKE ONE STOP AND THINK AND BE THANKFUL, IT WAS TO HIM I WENT WITH MANY A PROBLEM AND ONE OF THEM WAS THE ISSUE OF GOOD AND EVIL. IT WAS THIS MAN THAT TOLD ME CALVARY IS NOT WHAT MEN DID TO JESUS BUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR MEN. HE BELIEVED WITH ALL HIS BEING IN THE SUPREMACY OF GOOD AND COULD SEE ITS POTENTIAL IN ANY SITUATION.

BOTH HE AND HIS WIFE WERE VERY FOND OF CHILDREN AND MADE QUITE A FUSS OVER OUR DAUGHTER, SO WHEN THEY TOLD US THEY WOULD SOON HAVE A CHILD WE ALL WERE VERY JOYFUL. THEY RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA, SETTLED BACK DOWN AND YOUNG PETER WAS BORN. IT WAS ONLY A FEW WEEKS AGO THAT WE GOT THE LETTER TELLING US THAT PETER IS A MONGOLOID.

THIS IS TRAGEDY THAT IS FAITH SHAKING, HOW CAN ONE BELIEVE THAT GOOD REIGNS OVER EVIL WHEN ONE'S FIRST BORN WILL PROBABLY NEVER SEE ADULTHOOD LET ALONE LIVE NORMALLY. ? AND YET THERE WERE NO COMPLAINTS, JUST A CASUAL STATEMENT IN THE MIDST OF THE OTHER NEWS. I AM SURE THAT THIS EVENT, THAT WOULD SHAKE THE FAITH OF MOST OF US, HAS DONE NOTHING TO MY FRIEND. HIS JOY AND PRIDE IS NO LESS BECAUSE HE KNOWS GOOD CAN WIN AND HE WILL MAKE IT WIN.

PAUSE

NOW HAVING EXAMINED THE MEANING OF THE CROSS AND THE EASTER MESSAGE BRIEFLY WHAT ARE OUR WORDS.

THE BATTLE THAT JESUS CHRIST FOUGHT WAS NOT EASY, IT WAS NO PUSHOVER. IT COST HIM HUMILIATION, UNBEARABLE TORTURE AND THE PAIN OF DEATH. HE WON THE BATTLE AGAINST EVIL BUT HE CARRIED WITH HIM ITS SCARS.

WE MUST FIGHT THIS BATTLE TOO. THERE IS EVIL IN THE WORLD, THERE IS EVIL IN THE SOUL OF EVERY LAST ONE OF US. WE CAN IGNORE IT AND SAY THAT ALL LIFE IS ROSY: WE CAN LET IT REIGN SUPREME OR FOLLOWING OUR LORD WE CAN STRUGGLE WITH IT. A CRUCIFIED SAVIOR PROMISES US NO EASY BATTLE EITHER, WE, LIKE HIM, MUST EXPECT TO PICK UP A FEW SCARS ON THE WAY. IF WE STRUGGLE AGAINST EVIL WE WILL GET OUR HANDS DIRTY AND OUR CLOTHES TORN, WE WILL EXPERIENCE HURT FEELINGS AND HUMILIATION. BUT IT IS NOT A HOPELESS FIGHT. JUST AS THE CROSS WARNS THAT THE GOING WILL BE TOUGH SO THE EMPTY TOMB JOYFULLY ANNOUNCES THAT THAT BATTLE CAN BE WON, THE ENEMY IS NOT INVINCIBLE.

GOOD CAN REIGN IN THE WORLD AND ESPECIALLY IN OUR LIVES BUT IT REQUIRES AN EFFORT, IF WE WANT TO, OUT OF EVERY CONCEIVABLE SITUATION WE CAN SEE AND REALIZE THE POSSIBILITY OF GOOD, THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF A CROSS AND EMPTY TOMB.

BEFORE US

WHAT WILL OUR WORDS TO THE CROSS BE? THANKFULNESS FIRSTLY, THAT GOD HAS GONE ~~FIRST~~ INTO BATTLE AND SHOWN US VICTORY. SECONDLY DEVOTION TO OUR TASK, A PLEDGE OF LOYALTY TO THE CHRIST THAT WE WILL STRUGGLE IN OUR OWN WAY, THAT HIS BANNER SHALL NEVER FALL.

"FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE ON THE CROSS O GOD WE ARE THANKFUL, AND TO YOU AND YOUR STRUGGLE WE PLEDGE ETERNAL FAITHFULNESS. YOUR BATTLE IS OUR BATTLE AND WE WILL NOT LOSE."